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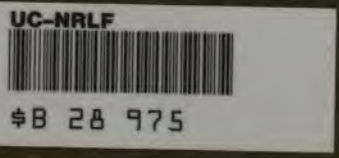

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LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY.

A SERMON

BY

ELI FAY.

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LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY.

A SERMON

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

BY

ELI FAY.

DELIVERED AT THE CHURCH OF THE UNITY, LOS ANGELES, JANUARY 13, REPEATED, BY REQUEST, JANUARY 27, 1889,

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LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY.

Acts xxiv. 14.—AFTER THE WAY WHICH THEY CALL HERESY, SO WORSHIP I THE GOD OF MY FATHERS.

I Peter iii. 15.—BE READY AT ALL TIMES TO GIVE TO HIM THAT ASKETH, A REASON OF THE HOPE THAT IS IN YOU.

Heresy is not a crime. Heresy is simply the opinion of the minority. In Salt Lake City Mormonism is orthodox. In Italy, Spain and Portugal Romanism is orthodox. In Scotland Presbyterianism is orthodox. But for a long time christianity itself was heresy. And in the great religious, political and social revolutions of the world, the *minority*—the *heretics*—have, as a rule, been nearest the truth. So Paul dared say to Felix, before whom he was to be tried, "After the way which they *call* heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers." But he was able to give to those who asked, a reason for the hope that was in him. A REASON! that which a good lawyer, a thorough scientist, any man who wishes to see the philosophy of things would recognize as a valid reason. Not a mere superstition; not a conceit resting on a bank of fog—but a REASON.

There is one fact in regard to which there is entire agreement among all classes, viz., that in connection with theology and religion, radical and far-reaching changes are going on. There may be utter disagreement as to whether these changes are for the better or worse; but in regard to many doctrines hitherto held as fundamental, and also in regard to the very essence of religion, that *radical* changes in the public mind are taking place, have already taken place, cannot be doubted by any fairly informed person.

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2. It is equally apparent that a very large proportion of the irreconcilable dissenters from the old definitions of religion, are among the most intelligent, the most conscientious, the most respected and influential of the communities in which they live. These people are not disbelievers in sacred things. On the contrary they are the profoundest believers. Indeed, it is because moral and spiritual concerns have become so *real* to them; it is because they are disturbed, even distressed when the intrinsic beauty of religion is marred, its natural adaptedness to the human soul is obscured, and its sweet influence, its refining, elevating, inspiring, directing power is weakened by theological technicalities, incongruities and absurdities, that, in fidelity to their finest moral and spiritual instincts, they have been obliged to discard the old faith.

It is at this precise point that they stumble. They *do* not and they *cannot* see why they should stultify their *reason*—their only guide in connection with other matters—for the purpose of accepting religious doctrines, and conforming to religious customs that were conceived in the dark ages, and decided upon by men who would now be regarded as ignoramuses and even barbarians. They do not believe that those men, who had not seen even the *morning shimmer* of the philological, philosophical, historic, scientific, literary, or religious light of our day, were competent to formulate the religious creed of the world for all time. To express the idea is to disclose its weakness. Should not theology be elaborated and religion expounded in accordance with our highest intelligence, our finest sentiments, our most humane and kindly feelings? Beyond all question is the world rapidly progressing in every other department of thought and life, but in religion were the utmost limits reached in the dark ages? Do you regard that as reasonable? Why not go back to the dark ages for our science, our politics, our educational system, our music, our poetry, our means of transportation?

And therefore Stopford Brooke, for many years one of the ablest clergymen of the great Church of England; Prof. Swing, long a star of the first magnitude among American Presbyterians;

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Dr. Thomas, a prodigious intellectual force and a decided pulpit power in the great Methodist Episcopal Church of this country; the Rev. Mr. Savage, once among the brightest young ministers in the Congregational body—today one of the strongest men in the American pulpit—and scores and scores, scarcely less eminent, declare without the *slightest hesitation*, that since they abandoned the old creeds, the faith in which they were all brought up, and embraced *Liberal Christianity*, their minds have been cleared of many doubts and misgivings, their faith in God and man, in the beneficence of Providence and a destiny for our race that will be creditable to our Maker, has been immeasurably strengthened, their spiritual horizon unspeakably broadened and brightened, and life enriched and death disarmed to an extent incomprehensible to those who have not passed through a similar experience.

Some months ago a minister, who for several years had been the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Kansas City, having changed his faith, was installed as the pastor of the First Unitarian Church of that city. And as showing what is going on in the public mind, *every one* of the ministers assembled to take part in the services of installation was a convert from the orthodox ministry. And within the past two weeks I have been called upon by a bright young man of fine address, a graduate of an eastern college, who has preached for two or three years in an orthodox denomination. He came to say that he could no longer preach orthodoxy and would like a pulpit among us.

And these men only represent the great change that is going on throughout Protestant christendom and the high motive which is prompting it; and consequently it will not do to charge with infidelity, or even with indifference to religion, those who are passing through the theological transition that is modifying the religious thought of the world.

3. In this community, as must be well known, there are very considerable numbers with exceptionally acute moral and spiritual sensibilities, and a wide intellectual outlook who, not from a sudden impulse, not from any mere freak or fancy, but from

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profound, gradually-formed and still strengthening convictions, are entirely out of sympathy with the old faith. Many of these people were brought up in that faith and could give specific reasons for discarding it. But as the masses, engaged in daily practical life, can hardly be expected to become well-versed theologians, many of this class know better what they are *not*, than what they *are*, and where they do *not* belong than where they *do*. There is also a considerable class who, by the spirit of the time, the agitation that is going on, the utter disbelief that is frequently and boldly proclaimed, and the evident weakening of the old faith in the public mind, are confused, dazed, bewildered, adrift, and therefore exposed to danger; and unless their attention is arrested by a type of religious thought that is consonant with the widening, deepening and accelerating intellectual and religious tendencies of the day, and the highest intuitions of the soul, to them, and through them to the community at large, deplorable consequences will certainly ensue. And inside every branch of the Orthodox church, as is perfectly well known, there is inquiry and unrest, anxiety, doubt, and suspense; and in thousands of instances strong dissent from the doctrines which that church nominally holds to be fundamental. Today, the intelligent, the reluctant doubter, and there are many such, is the truest believer. Today, the honest, conscientious, fair-minded man who says he holds not only as untrue but as positively misleading and pernicious much that has been christened in the sacred name of religion, is probably among the most reverent and exemplary of the community in which he lives. It is well and widely known that in connection with the dominant church there are very considerable numbers who are in a false position; tacitly assenting to doctrines and forms which they privately acknowledge to their friends that they no longer believe or accept. Now it is perfectly obvious that for the honor of the church herself, in the name of religion, and in the service of the soul, this state of things should cease. It cannot remain without ultimately impeaching, for their dis-

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honesty and double-dealing, the churches to which these persons belong.

For, if Unitarianism is inimical to true piety, and destructive to the soul, it is quite as much to be deprecated, and as resolutely to be hunted down, inside, as outside the orthodox church. And yet, by the admissions of its own press, that church, including its ministry, is honeycombed through and through by the fascinating heresy. And if the orthodox churches of this city will treat as heretics all who are in cordial sympathy with our broad and genial thought, they will have work enough for the next year.

4. Almost all of the agitation, the unrest, the doubt, the denial and the change of base to which I have referred, are occasioned by increasing sympathy with the general class of religious ideas known as *Liberal Christianity*. This is perfectly well known. And therefore it is vastly better for all denominations and all moral and religious interests, that particularly in an active and intelligent community like this, the Liberal church should be largely and vigorously represented. It can draw from the Orthodox church only those who, for their own comfort, and for the sake of honesty and conscientiousness in religion ought to leave it. It can attract from the great non-church-going masses, only those over whom orthodoxy can exert no positive influence. And yet, as each political party acts on the other, greatly to the country's good, as brakes as well as steam are necessary to a train of cars, as the order of the material universe is preserved, solely because the centripetal and centrifugal forces modify one another, so, for speaking peace to many a soul now deeply distressed, for bringing light and hope and joy to many who are in darkness and despair, for providing spiritual asylum for numbers now unchurched, for bringing all of the gravest questions to the arbitrament of the higher reason, for its legitimate function of criticism, for the strong emphasis it gives to practical righteousness as well as piety, for its solemn warnings against excessive other-worldliness in religion, for its well known sympathy with all humanitarian movements and the pre-eminent character of its literature, to which Channing, Emerson, Longfellow, Martineau, Holmes,

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Whittier, Lowell, Bancroft, Starr King and many others, among the ablest men of the world have been life-long contributors, Liberal Christianity merits and is receiving the cordial recognition of the civilized world.

And now, for the purpose of enabling a large class, for whom I have profound sympathy, to decide whether or not they are in general accord with us, I shall proceed to give as fully as possible, in the time which custom allots to a sermon, the *doctrinal* views we hold. And I shall do this with the full persuasion that any faith that is sacred to conscientious people ought not to be contemptuously treated. First, then, let me admit that though liberal christians have a theology, they do not dogmatize. They are tolerant—liberal towards those with whom they disagree—because they do not believe that even correct views of theological technicalities are the foundation or mainspring of the religious life. A reprobate may have very correct opinions in regard to all sacred things, and a true lover of God and a devoted servant of man may have no interest whatever in dogmatic theology. And yet, as we know, there are conceptions of divine things, God, Christ, the conditions of salvation and the outcome of life, which are well calculated to exalt or depress, inspire or dishearten. But when we become tolerant, liberal, though we may have definite opinions of our own, and at times find it necessary to defend them, we yet gladly concede that the salvation of the soul does not hang on the acceptance of specific theological notions, but rather on the personal quality and character. And we rejoice that this more generous conception of the true christian spirit is beginning to find expression far outside of our fold. And yet, Liberal Christians exercising their reason, in connection with religious questions as everywhere else, interpreting scripture in the light of history, of science, of other sacred books,—the bibles of other nations, and in accordance with our common moral and spiritual intuitions, and without any attempt to reach a general conclusion, certainly without any attempt at coercion, any persecution for opinion's sake are fairly agreed upon the following great affirmations and denials:

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I. The liberal christian, with all the intensity of conviction that characterizes his orthodox brother, believes in God, the *Infinite God*, the—all—pervading—Spirit, the Creator and upholder of all things; or as Paul says, "the *one* God and Father of all, who is above all, and through and in us all." Gladly, enthusiastically, he makes this proclamation. But believing this with all his heart, and emphasizing it with all the strength of complete pursuasion, the Liberal Christian does not accept the doctrine of the Trinity, and for the following reasons:

1. It is nowhere stated in the Bible, nor in the Bible is there a statement that is at all equivalent to the proposition that God exists in three Persons, each of whom is also the very and eternal God. Of this we make a decided point.

2. There is no language in the Bible in which the doctrine can be stated. The words and phrases: Triune, Triad, Trinity, One in three, Three in one, First Person, Second Person, Third Person, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, etc., etc., are not in the Scriptures. Is not the omission remarkable if that doctrine is the chief corner-stone of Christianity?

3. Over and over again the Bible declares that God is one, not three. Over and over again the Bible declares that Christ is the Son of God, not God the Son. In proof of this, I could quote chapter and verse till you would weary of the repetition.

4. Clearly assuming the unity of God's nature, consciousness, and personality, almost seven thousand singular nouns and pronouns are used in the Bible when speaking of him, whereas, if in him there were a Trinity of co-equal Persons, only plural nouns and pronouns would properly represent him. Consider the strength of this argument.

5. It is not found in the creeds of the early church. Cardinal Newman, beyond all comparison the ablest and most scholarly prelate among English-speaking Catholics, frankly acknowledges that the earlier creeds of the church do not teach the doctrine—a very remarkable, yet truthful concession.

6. With all respect for our brethren of the Orthodox faith and stating the fact as gently as possible, we yet say that to us the

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doctrine of the Trinity is absolutely unthinkable. When we are told that there are three Persons, each of whom is absolutely God; that the Father is God because in, and of himself he possesses all the attributes of God; that the Son is God because in and of himself he possesses all the attributes and powers of the Godhead, and the same of the Holy Spirit, and yet that there is but one God, our reply is that we do not see how people can believe the proposition any more than we see how people could believe the following, that in principle is identical with it, viz.: there are three persons, Peter, James and John, each of whom is a man because he possesses all the attributes of a man, and yet there is but one man. Is not the difficulty of belief precisely the same in the two cases?

And now without the slightest asperity, and yet as showing how far the current theology has strayed from sound logic, and even from common sense, it is sufficient to say that if under oath, a man were to declare his belief that three persons, each of whom is a man because he has in himself all the attributes of a man, constitute but one man, he would be ordered off the witness's stand as incompetent to testify, and the fact might be used as evidence of his insanity. But if he declares his belief that three persons, each of whom is God, because he possesses all the attributes of God constitute but one God, he is thought to be sound in the faith. What are we obliged—*obliged* to think of the intellectual character, the intellectual loyalty of the man who declares it to be his firm belief that the builder of this material universe, he who as truly lived and wrought and reigned, and was as greatly needed in the sun, moon and stars as in this speck of earth, came here 1800 years ago and was actually born of a woman as the only means of recovering what he had inadvertently lost—that the Virgin Mary carried in her arms and—n-u-r-s-e-d at her b-r-e-a-s-t, as a hungry, crying child, the illimitable and everlasting God; him "who dipped his fingers in chaos and flung off worlds." I put it to you strongly: is that *believable?*

Feeling it to be our religious duty to abide by our absolutely distinct intellectual perceptions, that disloyalty to vivid ideas is

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gross injustice to the light God has given for our guidance, we reject this doctrine. And yet God with his one mind, one will, one consciousness, one Person, with his indivisible Unity, is to us, all that he can be to our Trinitarian brethren; infinite in wisdom, goodness, power, love; our Father and everlasting Friend, the *all* in *all* of things; and we think that our idea of Him is immensely superior to the other, in this respect. Its simplicity and complete intelligibility unifies and vivifies our conception of him, and by eliminating the complexity and the perplexity which have greatly disturbed millions, it conduces to a sweet and wholesome piety, and to the natural and healthy action of the mind. And this is an obvious practical advantage that can hardly be over-estimated.

II. Believing implicitly in the divine wisdom and goodness, we cannot accept the doctrine of the Fall of Man; as it seems to us that it directly and unanswerably impugns the moral character of God. You know what it is, as you have heard it again and again. God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, having planned for them immunity from all evil and suffering, and unspeakable and eternal happiness in this world. But from pure diabolism, from envy, and jealousy, and hatred, and malice, a great evil being whom God also created, and who had previously attempted to wrest from the Almighty the jurisdiction of his kingdom, entered Eden in the form of a serpent, and tempted Adam and Eve not only to their own ruin, but causing also the corruption and ruin of the entire human family, subjecting them to the wrath and curse of God. We reject this doctrine for the following reasons:

1. Science makes it altogether improbable that Adam and Eve were created as it is popularly supposed they were. If the doctrine of Evolution, now accepted by the leading thinkers of the world is true, it is entirely certain that they were not thus created.

2. If the doctrine of Evolution is true, it is almost certain that the entire human family did not originate with Adam and Eve, but rather, as one scientist puts it, there must have been a

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dozen Adams; in which case the doctrine in question utterly fails. And the hypothesis that the human family originated at different times and places, and so had a various parentage explains many facts which hitherto have greatly puzzled the critical student of human history and of diverse human peculiarities.

3. To us, it is entirely clear that an infinitely wise and good God would not, and could not have created such a being as the devil is represented to be, and turned him loose to dispute even the divine Sovereignty, thwart the divine plans, and deceive, torment, and ruin the human family. What father would allow a profane, lying, drunken, licentious, yet fascinating, human devil to associate with his children and tempt them to their utter destruction?

4. According to this doctrine God was thwarted, circumvented, defeated and compelled to change his base and begin anew, and for thousands of years he has been *ineffectually* striving to recover what he lost by the first stroke of his arch enemy; the devil has snatched from the divine hand the reins-of-government, and today the kingdom of God is in ruins. Mr. Moody, the most successful living revivalist, who has been endorsed by the great orthodox denominations of the country, says: "This world is a wreck and is bound to sink. The most that we can do is to get off as many as possible of her passengers and crew, and *let her go.*" Now is it not as clear as a sunbeam that Mr. Moody, and all who agree with him, worship and serve either a malignant God who *planned* to wreck the world and the human race, or a defeated, disappointed, incompetent and dishonored God who was no match for the devil?

I am not exaggerating, as according to this doctrine the great enemy of God and man is in the ascendant, and a vast majority of the human family are at this moment on the road to eternal destruction. In this are obviously involved both the wisdom and the moral character of God. For example, if even of his professed generosity a man should build high above a city, a reservoir for the storage of water for that city's good, and the first time the reservoir was filled, the dam should break away

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and the whole plain below be deluged and the city destroyed, would it not be clear that the plan of the reservoir was not well devised or that the work was not well done; and that in either case and on the highest moral grounds, and despite the good intentions of the builder he would not only be responsible for the overwhelming disaster, but afterward, *totally* unworthy of confidence as a business man? Applying the same principle to the case in hand, our only alternative is to reject the doctrine under consideration, as it not only impugns the moral character of God, but by teaching that his first great world-scheme for our race was utterly frustrated, it destroys all ground of confidence in him. In our terrible civil war, we learned from sad experience that a commander who had once been surprised, routed and driven from his own chosen ground, his soldiers slain and his ammunition captured, could not again be trusted, as he could give no assurance that in the next emergency a similar disaster would not await him. Dear friends, if you wish me to believe and trust in God, pray do not tell me that he has once been completely out-generalled by the devil, and has not yet recovered from the immeasurable disaster.

5. We reject this doctrine because the penalty it inflicts is appallingly, infinitely disproportioned to the crime said to have been committed. If a small boy, arrested in Los Angeles for stealing an apple, were sentenced to imprisonment for life in a dark cell, and to subsistence upon bread and water, that sentence could not be executed, nor could the judge rendering it retain his office, so irrepressible would be the moral indignation that would be excited in this community. And yet even such a sentence for such a crime is but a drop to the ocean, in comparison with the *eternal-damnation-of-uncounted-millions*—as the result of two persons eating once of forbidden fruit. Punish them as they deserve, but in *heaven's name* do not forever damn them and a vast majority of their posterity to the end of time.

III. We believe that man *was*, and still *is*, created in the image of God; that by nature he is a child of God; that he needs religion not because Adam or anybody else has sinned, but because

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he has a moral and spiritual constitution that is adapted to a moral and spiritual experience, as the wing of the bird to air, and the fin of the fish to water. We believe that with promptings as sweet and natural as those which, with all its little troubles, take a child to its mother's arms, a man may come directly into the presence of God, and that even in his sins, he has no other friend like his Heavenly Father. And therefore we do not accept the doctrine of the *vicarious atonement*, viz., that in our room and stead Christ died, suffering the penalty that was due to us. According to our conception of the character of God and of the nature of forgiveness, no such atonement was either necessary or possible.

1. To us it seems to be in direct conflict with the doctrine of the divine mercy. God would not forgive the sinner till the penalty of his broken law had been visited upon some one, and God himself actually inflicted that penalty upon his son Jesus Christ. Thus the innocent suffered instead of the guilty, which completely reverses our instinctive idea of both justice and mercy, and destroys, were it possible to destroy, the relations between innocence and internal comfort, and crime and its legitimate consequences. There is neither justice nor mercy in punishing the innocent instead of the guilty.

2. This doctrine is totally irreconcilable with that of the parable of the prodigal son, given by Christ for the purpose of illustrating the forgiving love of God. Solely through the promptings of the true, fatherly heart, and not because an innocent person had suffered the penalty due to the foolish and wicked young man, he was received back into the dear old home. And does not this settle forever the question as to the condition of the divine forgiveness?

3. We fully believe that this doctrine is immoral in its tendencies; as it presents a substitute for high moral character, for actual personal worth, and appeals to low and selfish motives. It says in so many words that dependence upon conformity to the moral law, as a condition of salvation, is offensive to God and dangerous to the soul; that our only hope of heaven is in the blood of Christ. And in as much as personal worth is thus

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openly and purposely disparaged, we are not surprised that among large numbers who profess to have been saved by the vicarious atonement, the standard of character is so low that business men from a business standpoint fight shy of them. By downright falsehood and misrepresentation and all the tricks of trade, as in both hemispheres I have repeatedly been told, business men are frequently deceived and profusely bled by church members who are staking their eternal salvation on the blood of Christ. A bishop of the Church of England recently bemoaned the low standard of morality among Christians; and a few years ago the great Wesleyan body of England appointed a day of fasting and prayer in consequence of the same deplorable condition. But how can it be otherwise when from the pulpit and in the sacred name of religion, the sterling moralities are declared to be of no account in the salvation of the soul? Individual worth is as filthy rags. We are to be saved because Christ suffered in our stead, not because we are worth saving.

And according to this definition of religion, there is many a diminutive and slippery saint whose word you would not take, who could not get trust for a pound of meat or a yard of cloth, and to whose low personal level you would be ashamed to descend, but who is in high favor with God and on the road to heaven; and many a splendid sinner whose word is as good as his bond, who is trusted and honored by all who know him, but who is on the road to hell. It is this definition of religion that is arousing widespread dissatisfaction, not to say downright scepticism. And that you may see how the question of accepting salvation because Christ is represented to have suffered in our stead, is affecting many of the noblest minds, involving as it does a high moral principle, and the very foundation of true self-respect, I will ask you to consider the following circumstance: About fifty years ago, in western New York, there was a school in which were a large, coarse-fibred, headstrong boy who was full of malicious mischief and low, vulgar tricks; and another of exactly the opposite temperament and tendency; auburn haired, light-complexioned, blue-eyed, high-minded, thoroughly

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truthful, but still a fun-loving boy. One day, while the back of the master was turned, a circumstance occurred which greatly enraged him; and, as the two boys above described were sitting side by side, the master assuming, of course, that the first named was the guilty one, prepared to punish him severely; and in those days punishment in school meant something. But just as the great cherry ruler was about to fall with awful force upon the open palm of the first above named, the second sprang to his feet and exclaimed, "Sir, John did not do it, I did it. I intended no harm, did not think what I was doing, and I am very sorry; but, sir, do not punish John for what I did. I could not bear that. Please punish me."

And now the question I put to you, the question I would put to the civilized world, the question which I willingly leave at the door of the human heart is, whether in declining to accept salvation from punishment through the suffering of an innocent party, that boy did not manifest a spirit incomparably finer and nobler, a sentiment vastly more creditable and more truly religious, than he would have done had he allowed John to receive the penalty due himself. Is it not perfectly obvious that without sacrificing his self-respect, without cowardice and selfishness and demoralization at the very fountain of his life, he could not have allowed another to suffer in his stead? It is at this precise point that this doctrine is distressing thousands of the finest spirits of the age—people of the acutest moral and spiritual sensibilities.

Horace Mann, one of the noblest souls that ever dwelt in flesh, once said that if he were to accept the orthodox conditions of salvation, and thereon enter heaven, he should be eternally ashamed to look Christ in the face. Think of congratulating ourselves that our bondsman had to pay our debts—that another's fingers are in the trap on our account while we go free. Thus is it turning out that much of the so-called infidelity of our day is evincing an incomparably finer feeling, a profounder self-respect, than much of the religion of our day. And it was on this and kindred ground that one of the most intelligent women on this

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coast recently declared that administered religion had become positively demoralizing.

But do not infer that Christ is of no account to us, because we do not accept the vicarious atonement. In our conception of divine things we think Christ is not *less* but *more* important than he is according to the orthodox conception. That represents him as the great physician. And the physician holds an important place, but the physiologist's is even more important. For, necessary as it is that some should know how to administer medicine properly, it is vastly more necessary that we should be so instructed and so live as not to need it. And this illustrates the radical difference between the two systems of thought. In the one, Christ is the great physician, and religion is a medicine. To how large a number has it been a very bitter medicine! In the other, Christ is the great teacher, unfolding the laws of the moral and spiritual life, as the physiologist shows the influence on the body of good, plain, nutritous food, pure air and pure water, exercise and rest, cheerfulness and sunshine, the great natural, universal, indispensable agents for the preservation, and even the restoration of health.

IV. We reject the doctrine of endless punishment; and we have numerous and unanswerable reasons for so doing. Upon these reasons I cannot now enter *seriatim*. The time is too short. Suffice it to say, first, that neither God nor angel, neither man nor devil, could derive the slightest benefit from the eternal suffering of any creature,—insect or fiend. What good could it do?

I cannot understand the man who shoots down a free and innocent bird, or catches fish, or hunts wild animals for sport. Is it nothing to maim a living creature and send it through all the tortures of a lingering death? I cannot understand the man who knows that his habits are wringing scalding tears from one who would die for him if he were loyal to her. Do we, thick-skinned, nerveless, insensate creatures realize what agony is? But what of anguish that never lifts, torment excruciating and eternal.

Secondly: the doctrine is irreconcilable with the character of God. Beyond all question, if the creation of man unavoidably

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involved such exposure, then the creative act should not have been performed. We sing with the poet, who said:

> Thank God that I have lived to see the time
> When the great truth begins at last to find
> Expression from the deep heart of mankind,
> Noble and free, that all revenge is crime,
> That man is holier than any creed,
> That all restraint upon him must consult his good,
> Hope's sunshine linger on his prison walls,
> And love look in upon his solitude.

> We think that heaven will not be shut forevermore
> Without a knocker left upon the door,
> Lest some belated wanderer should come,
> Heart-broken, asking just to die at home;
> So that the Father will at last forgive,
> And looking in his face, that soul shall live.
> We think there will be watchmen out through all the night
> To lead the lost from darkness into light,
> That he who loved us into life must be
> A father, infinitely fatherly;
> And groping for him, these shall find their way,
> From outer darkness into perfect day.

This is our faith; and in it we gladly and gratefully rest. You must perceive that it is not a series of glittering negations. We affirm; affirm variously, broadly, strongly, grandly. It seems to us that no other church affirms so much.

We affirm the divine existence, the divine sovereignty, the divine love.

We affirm that God is God, and that he understands his business.

We affirm that evil and sin are temporary, and that truth and righteousness are the eternal principles and must ultimately prevail.

We affirm that this is God's world, the government of which he does not share with a great evil being who keeps him under perpetual limitations.

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We affirm that human nature and human life are intrinsically sacred—a condition that alone makes sin possible.

We affirm the grand prerogatives as well as the resposibilities of the human soul.

We affirm that the most effectual way of saving a man, in the largest and truest sense, is to make him a man. Soul-building is the best and cheapest process of soul saving.

We affirm that all legitimate experience is religious.

Are not these, transcendent and inspiring affirmations? They express the growing conviction of the world. We know nothing of a good christian, who is a bad husband or father, or wife or mother —nothing of a good christian who, receiving the communion on Sunday, tells business lies through all the following week; nothing of a good christian who puts the best apples and oranges at the top of the boxes, and worthless ones at the bottom; intending to balance the account by singing peans to the grace of God and the blood of Jesus Christ.

We do not believe that the mother, whose ragged and dirty children are running in the street from morning till night, has a right to give a cent or a moment to the Foreign Missionary Society. She had better organize in her own house a society for the conversion of heathen. We believe that the home is as sacred as the church; that the multiplication table and the moral law work towards the same great end; that truth, and beauty, and music, and society, and love, and labor, and even disappointment and sorrow, are helps in the education and development of the soul. We believe that true religion, instead of being repugnant to human nature, is its consummate flowering and fruitage.

I need not be told that thousands, whose faith I have criticised this morning, are excellent people, or that they are doing excellent christian work. I understand that. But the point I make is that in their work of religious self-culture, or of christian propagandism, they are not helped, but greatly hindered by the doctrines I have reviewed. These doctrines never, never brought a ray of light or a thrill of rational joy to a single soul, but they have filled millions with unutterable gloom and foreboding. By thousands within the orthodox fold they are felt to be an incubus upon the christian

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church. You prefer not to hear them and with good reason. Their character is indicated by the fact that they constitute Mr. Ingersoll's stock in trade. Our orthodox friends, whom we respect and love, are genial, hopeful, trustful, charitable, tender, not because of these doctrines, but in spite of them. God be thanked that there are vast numbers, so sweet and pure, and spontaneous of heart that their terrible creed produces but little effect upon them. But if you would know what effect it produces upon natures severely logical, read what Catherine Beecher says of the effect upon her, of her own father's preaching. It nearly drove her to the insane asylum. Many and many an hour when she should have been asleep, she spent in tears, that she had been born. And her experience has been repeated ten thousand thousand times. It is not a week since a devoted wife and mother, a thoroughly conscientious and high minded woman of this city, declared that, influenced by these doctrines, in agony and tears she had repeatedly deplored her own existence.

Dear friends, I never visit the homes of the poor and distressed, I never bow at the bedside of the sick and the dying, I never stand at the head of an open grave, into which, struck down at the high noon of life, a beloved husband is being buried, and realize that from that hour, a widow, desolate, tearful, over-burdened, haggard, heart-hungry, world-weary, will tread alone her winding path, without thanking God from the lowest depth of my soul for the faith that in the sorest trial, gives confidence and joy and peace. And if I can aid a little, in planting in this growing city, a church whose special function it shall be, to shoot rays of heavenly light through all earthly fog and darkness, to broaden the spiritual vision, to stimulate faith and hope, to bind up the broken hearted, to provide spiritual asylum for the sorrowing, to show that religion is natural as well as necessary, that the inner, the actual, personal qualities and forces are the chief concern, that character is the great end of our being, I will gratefully say with Simeon of old, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

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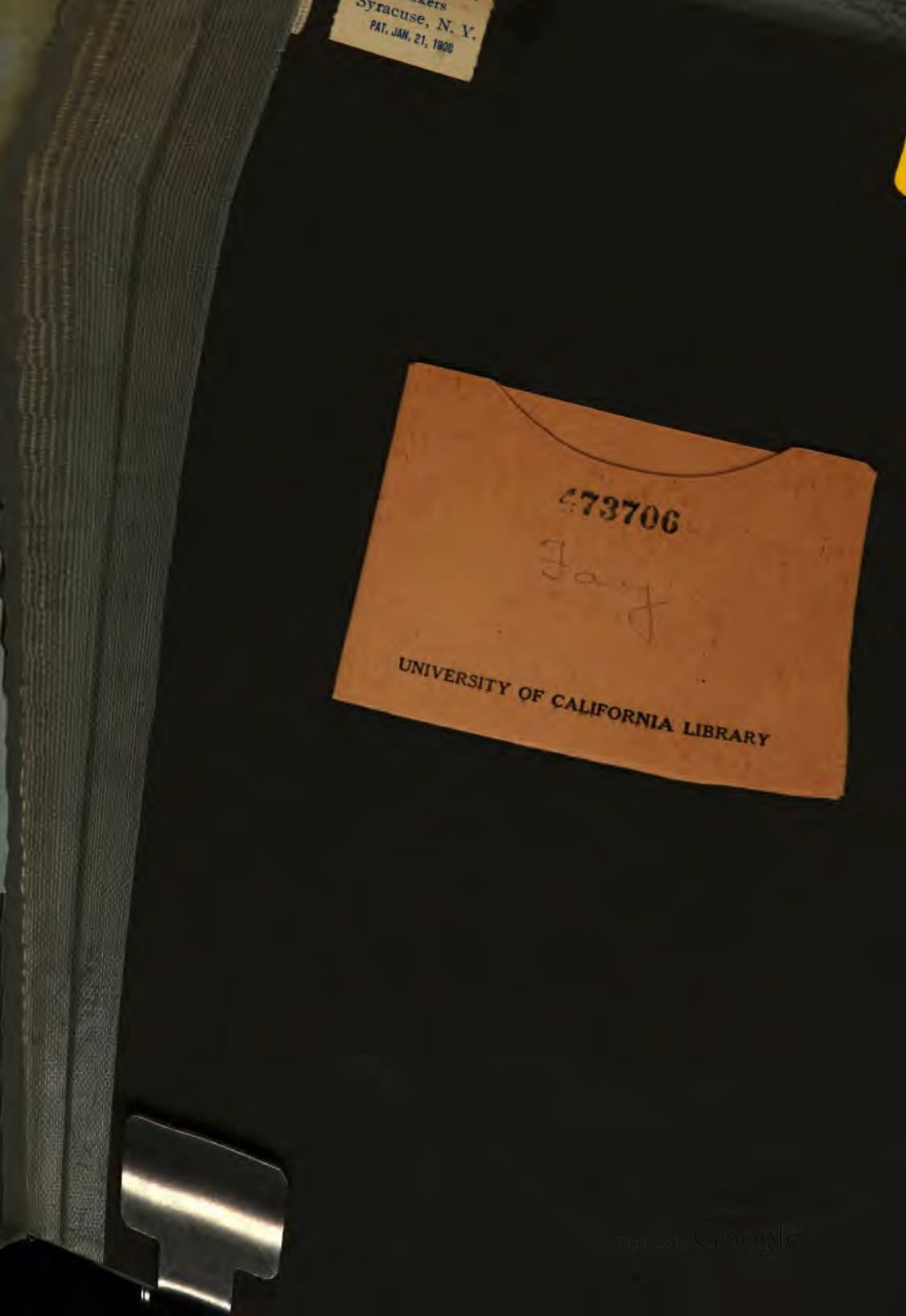
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